

King County Agricultural Lands Study Advisory Committee  
July 23, 2004  
Meeting Summary

Attending: Paul Reitenbach, KC DDES  
Bob Tidball, KC Agriculture Commission, farmer  
Eric Nelson, KC Agriculture Program  
Todd Klinka, KC GIS  
Chandler Felt, KC Budget Office  
Bill Osborne, City of Kent  
Leonard Bauer, WA CTED  
Betty Renkor, WA CTED

Invited but unable to attend: Roberta Lewandowski, City of Redmond; Brad Gaolach, WSU Extension; Sylvia Kantor, WSU Extension.

King County representatives provided an overview of agriculture in King County. About 40,500 acres are in the five Agricultural Production Districts (APD). The APDs include Enumclaw Plateau, Lower Green River, Upper Green River, Sammamish Valley and Snoqualmie Valley. There are 1,175 acres in the Farmland Preservation Program, with 719 acres of those acres in the unincorporated area and the rest in cities. About 25,000 acres of ag operations are conducted on rural lands and help to support the ag infrastructure. The types of agriculture in the County include dairy, livestock, turf farms, and horticulture. Horticulture in the Snoqualmie Valley APD is growing. Farms tend to be small and intensely used, and many horticulture farms are sustainable, organic farms.

Agriculture commissions from counties in the Puget Sound area conduct an ag summit twice yearly to discuss relevant issues. The focus is generally agricultural economic development. The next summit is scheduled for December.

Agricultural operations continue in the City of Kent on approximately 35 acres, according to City Planner Bill Osborne.

Discussion of Study items

*a) Amount of land designated as agricultural land with long-term commercial significance.*

King County has designated 41,279 acres as agricultural land, and Kent has designated 51 acres as agricultural land. King County's "no net loss" of agriculture policy has resulted in a stabilizing of the amount of land in agriculture. The County first designated agriculture lands in its 1985 Comprehensive Plan.

*b) Amount of land in agricultural production, and c) Changes of amount of agricultural land since 1990.*

The Census of Agriculture is useful for reporting trends but not necessarily an accurate representation of the number of acres in active agriculture. Farmers with small acreages are not necessarily captured in the census. The County conducted a survey and reports about 50,000 acres with agricultural operations.

*d) Comparison with amounts of land in other uses.*

County staff presented a table showing the comprehensive plan categories and acreages for each one.

*e) Designation standards and procedures.*

County staff had previously provided the criteria for designating ag lands.

*f) Effect of designation on tax revenue.*

Appraisals are starting to show a drop in price. Developers see the County is serious about its farmlands retention program.

*g) Contribution of agriculture to the local economy.*

A recent report indicates that agriculture contributed \$547 million to the local economy.

*h) Threats to maintaining the agricultural land base.*

Land speculation continues to threaten agriculture. Development firms and individuals are buying and holding ag land, taking it out of ag operations. Individuals are building large houses on ag land and not farming the land. Farmland lies fallow and property owners will not lease the land to farmers.

Critical areas regulations also may pose a threat by taking large amounts of land out of production.

*i) Measures local government should adopt...*

Follow up on King County's *Farm and Forest* report recommendations. (This report outlines threats to agriculture and presents a package of strategies and incentives to preserve agricultural lands and encourage the business of farming. The County has acted on a number of these recommendations, including the Puget Sound Fresh marketing campaign, hiring a farm specialist, working on a regional basis with other jurisdictions.)

Continue the Farmland Preservation Program, which purchases development rights. Enact transfer of development right program.

The state should provide meaningful funding for its farmland preservation program, which has not been funded. The state also should provide support for farmers markets and the Farm Link program, which connects new farmers with experienced farmers. Farmers markets provide farmers with direct sales opportunities. Funding to rebuild the agriculture infrastructure is also needed. King County is investigating a mobile slaughter facility, mobile cannery and a kitchen and cannery operation to help provide infrastructure support for farmers.

*j) Any other type of information that will help the committees...*

Only 1 to 2 percent of food purchases made in King County is grown in King County. The of food purchased locally that is grown locally could be much higher.